

Women Philosophers Before 1300

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This paper traces historical records of several women philosophers in ancient and medieval philosophy. It asks two basic questions: (1) what is the relation between the theory of sex identity within a particular school of philosophy and the presence of women philosophers within it? and (2) why did the tradition of women philosophers suddenly end in the 13th century?

It may come as a surprise to discover that most "schools" of ancient and medieval philosophy had some women philosophers in attendance. This discovery opens up the following two questions: 1) why did this tradition of women philosophers end in the thirteenth century? And 2) was there any relation between the concept of woman articulated by a school of philosophy, and the presence of women philosophers within that tradition?

In this paper I will attempt to answer these two questions by examining the relation between women philosophers and the pre-Socratics, the Academy of Plato, Aristotle's Lyceum, the Epicurians, Stoics, neo-Platonists, and the Jewish, Islamic, and Christian schools of philosophy, up to the establishment of the University of Paris in 1215. A more detailed examination of the subject can be found in The Concept of Woman From 700 B.C. to 1300 A.D.: The Aristotelian Revolution.¹

If Hesiod is considered as a philosopher, rather than merely as a poet, then Sappho would also have to be recognized as the first woman philosopher in the West. Living around 600 B.C., Sappho wrote poems, especially in praise of women who shared her community on the island of Lesbos. Many of her poems are still extant and a few reflect on the virtue of reason.²

The first women to use discursive reasoning and to teach philosophy, were found in the Pythagorean school. While no dates are available for the women philosophers Theano, Perictione, Phytis, and Melissa, Pythagoras is known to have lived around 530 B.C. Several fragments of the women Pythagoreans remain. They usually involve an application of Pythagorean theory to the situation of woman; i.e. the need for harmony, the practice of virtue, and the value of clear thinking. In one fragment, Theano argued that women ought to develop the capacity for reflection. She said: "It is better to be reliant on a horse that we cannot stop, than to rely on an unreflective woman."³

The Pythagorean Perictione, the author of a dissertation on the hierarchy of the sciences entitled On Wisdom, also argued strongly for women to become philosophers in Harmony of Women:

It has to be understood that women should aim to be full of measure and circumspection in harmony. It is important, in

fact, that her soul aspire strongly after virtue, in order that she become just, courageous, measured, adorned with qualities agreeable to her nature, and hostile to any vain fame.⁴

Jamblique, in his Life of Pythagoras, stated that sixteen of the one-hundred eighteen Pythagoreans were women.⁵

The pre-Socratics also included the woman philosopher Aspasia, who lived around 440 B.C. The historian, Thucydides, described her as follows:

Only Pericles and Aspasia received your praise for being public speakers perfect in action and lofty in thought -- because they got this very perfect action and lofty thinking from Anaxagoras' everyday conversation and added to it the art of rhetoric.⁶

Aspasia's speech-making capacities were satirized by Plato in the dialogue Menexenus; Aeschines wrote an entire dialogue entitled Aspasia, and Xenophon referred to her as a teacher in the Oeconomicus.⁷ Unfortunately, Aspasia left no writings, so it is difficult to assess her philosophical abilities. However, it is well known that she established the first schools for women in Athens, at which mathematics and philosophy were basic to the curriculum.⁸

The only pre-Socratic philosopher to argue against women philosophers was Democritus (460-370 B.C.). In one fragment, he stated: "A woman must not practice argument: this is dreadful."⁹ It must be presumed, therefore, that it was controversial for a woman to desire to study and practice philosophy.

It is in this context that Plato's arguments in the Republic (c. 428-355 B.C.), take on some significance. Appealing to the nature of the soul as the determining factor in one's capacity for philosophy, he places the following dialogue in Socrates' words:

(Socrates): Can we, then, deny that one woman is naturally athletic and war-like and another unwar-like and adverse to gymnastics?

(Glaucon): I think not.

(Socrates): And again, one a lover, and another a hater, of wisdom? And one high-spirited, and the other lacking spirit?

(Glaucou): That is also true.

(Socrates): Then it is likewise true that one woman has the qualities of a guardian and another not.¹⁰

For Plato, even though a woman may be born inferior to man, as suggested in the Timaeus, she may also have a natural ability for philosophy, which in an ideal republic, she would be able to develop.¹¹

Plato's Academy contained at least two women. Diogenes Laertius described them after listing several male disciples of Plato: "And many others, among them two women, Lastheneia of Mantinea and Axiothea of Philius, who is reported by Dicaerchus to have worn men's clothes."¹² These two women continued to study under Speusippus, the head of the Academy, after Plato's death, to some considerable risk to his reputation. Diogenes reports:

It was said that among those who attended his lectures were the two women who had been pupils of Plato, Lasttheia of Manitea and Axiothea of Philius. And at the time Dionysius in a letter says derisively, "We may judge of your wisdom by the Arcadian girl who is your pupil."¹³

Aristotle (c. 341-270 B.C.) in the Politics, argued that woman did not have the capacity for deliberation:

Although the parts of the soul are present in all of them, they are present in different degrees. For the slave has no deliberative faculty at all; the woman has, but it is without authority, and the child has, but it is immature.¹⁴

Aristotle developed a comprehensive explanation for the rational inferiority of woman. Arguing that because females were colder than males, women were not able to produce fertile seed for generation. This lack in women led to the further conclusion that all children would be born male, unless some defect occurred in the material provided by the mother, or the seed provided by the father. This defect had consequences for women's deliberative powers. Her reason was "without authority" over her emotions; therefore, she was naturally incapable of doing philosophy. Aristotle never directly discussed women philosophers, and there is no evidence of any female disciple of Aristotle. After his death, however, there is some evidence that Hipparchia (c. 300 B.C.) followed the Aristotelian school when it was later

led by Theophrastus.¹⁵

Aristotle's school, founded in 335 B.C., lasted until some time during the first century B.C. Another school of philosophy was founded at approximately the same time by Epicurius (c. 341-370 B.C.). The Epicurian school was extremely popular, partly because of its emphasis upon the goal of personal happiness. It is known that a number of women were in its ranks.¹⁶ Lucretius was one of its most illustrious members, and it is interesting to note that he argued against Aristotle's biology by claiming that the female also provided seed in generation.¹⁷ The Epicurian school lasted until the fourth century A.D.

The Stoic school was founded in Greece by Zeno of Cittium, in 322 B.C. It did not become widespread until the Roman philosopher Cicero made its teaching central to his own work around 106-43 B.C. Cicero did not present any arguments in favour of women philosophers, although he did refer to women prophets and frequently personified philosophy as female. Seneca (4-65 A.D.) was the first Stoic philosopher to specifically argue that women ought to practice philosophy. In a letter to Marcia, he stated:

Who has asserted that Nature has dealt grudgingly with women's natures and has narrowly restricted their virtues? Believe me, they have just as much force, just as much capacity, if they like, for virtuous action.¹⁸

Seneca understood philosophy to be an invaluable guide to overcoming the vicissitudes of fortune. To his mother, Helvia, he wrote: "Philosophy is your most unfailing safeguard, and she alone can rescue you from the power of Fortune."¹⁹ He described how even though "old-fashioned strictness" of his father had limited his mother's study:

Yet, thanks to your acquiring mind, you imbibed more than might have been expected in the time you had; the foundations of all systematic knowledge have been laid. Do you return now to these studies; they will render you safe.²⁰

The Stoic Epictetus (50-? A.D.) mentioned that Roman women were studying Plato, albeit for the "wrong" reasons:

In Rome women make a study of Plato's Republic, because he enacts community of wives; for they only attend to the man's words and not to his spirit, not noticing that he does not first enact the marriage of one man and one woman and then wish wives to be common, but removes the first kind of marriage and then introduces another kind in its place.²¹

The later Stoics, Marcus Aurelius (121-180) and Galen (131-201), left no specific writings about women philosophers, although they both described Xanthippe as a derogatory influence on her husband, the philosopher Socrates. In addition, Galen partially followed Aristotle's concept of woman in his view that "The female is less perfect than the male by as much as she is colder than he."²² In this way, the support for an equality in the concept of woman and man by Seneca appeared to be overturned by this emphasis on the superiority of man in the later Stoics.

The above influence of Aristotelian theory on sex polarity, was matched by a corresponding influence of Platonic thought on a theory of sex unity. The neo-Platonists argued that women and men were basically the same. Plutarch (46-125) so admired women's examples of bravery and courage in war that he wrote Sayings of Spartan Women and The Bravery of Women.²³ He encouraged a married woman to study philosophy: "For a woman studying geometry will be ashamed to be a dancer, and she will not swallow any beliefs in magic charms while she is under the charm of Plato's or Zenophon's words."²⁴ In another essay entitled "Dinner of Seven Wise Men", Plutarch described the woman philosopher, Eumetis, who entertained herself by asking riddles of the other guests:

She uses these (riddles) like dice as a means of occasional amusement; and risks an encounter with all comers. But she is also possessed of a wonderful sense, a statesman's mind, and an admirable character, and she has influence with her father so that his government of the citizens has become milder and more popular.²⁵

While the most famous neo-Platonist, the philosopher Plotinus (205-270), left no record of consideration of woman's ability for philosophy, Porphyry (233-305) later reported that he had several women disciples:

There were women, too, who were greatly devoted to him: Gemina, in whose house he lived, and her daughter Gemina, who had the same name as her mother, and Amphicle, who became the wife of Aiston, son of Iamblichus, all of whom had a great devotion to Philosophy.²⁶

One of the reasons why Platonism remained so open to women philosophers, was their metaphysical belief that souls were reincarnated in different lives. Since the same soul could be born at one time in a man's body, and at another time in a woman's body, the soul itself was not sexually differentiated. Since the capacity for philosophy was a characteristic of the soul, a woman could be a philosopher as well as a man. This consequence was first articulated by the neo-Platonist Porphyry, in a letter to his wife Marcella:

For we are bound in the chains that nature has cast around us, by the belly, the throat, and other parts of the body. . . . But if we rise superior to their witchcraft, and avoid the snares laid by them, we have led our captor captive. Neither trouble thyself much whether thou be male or female in body, nor look on thyself as a woman, for I did not approach thee as such.²⁷

Porphyry reports that he chose Marcella for his wife because he was a philosopher: "I admired thee because thy disposition was suited to true philosophy."²⁸ He encouraged her to dedicate her life to the continuous study of philosophy and the practice of virtue.

In this context of openness to women philosophers, Hypatia (370-415) became the head of the Alexandrian School of Neo-Platonic Philosophy. Although all of Hypatia's writings are lost, it is known that she helped in a revision of the works of Ptolemy, wrote a commentary on Apollonius' Conics II, and wrote another commentary on Diophantus' Arithmetica.²⁹ Socrates, the ecclesiastical historian, stated: "She arrived to such a pitch of learning, as very far to exceed all the philosophers of her time."³⁰ Her learning covered not only mathematics, but "all other parts of philosophy".³¹

The only woman philosophers who had assumed a public teaching role prior to Hypatia, were the Pythagoreans and Aspasia; and they primarily taught women. Hypatia, on the other hand, taught the leading men of Alexandria:

Hypatia was by way of excellence named The Philosopher, altogether as much on account of her profound knowledge, as for her public profession of teaching. Nor was any Professor more admired by the world, or more dear to his own scholars. Hers were as remarkable as numerous.³²

It is likely that this public prominence made Hypatia vulnerable to the viscious conflict between Orestes, the governor of Alexandria, and Cyril, the Christian Bishop of Alexandria. In a series of retaliative murders, Hypatia was killed by Cyril and brutally quartered.³³ The Alexandrian school of neo-Platonism went into decline soon after her death. Then in 529, the Emperor Justinian, closed all non-Christian schools of philosophy.

After Justinian's actions, the neo-Platonists moved to Syria, taking copies of some of Plato's and Aristotle's writings. Here, in later centuries, Islamic philosophers wrote extensive summaries and commentaries on the Greek philosophers. While there appears to be no evidence of women Islamic philosophers, in a commentary on Plato's Republic Averroes suggests that women may share the same goals with men. "And we say that women, insofar as they are of one kind with men, necessarily share in the end of men."³⁴ Averroes applies this theory to the specific question of women philosophers:

Since some women are formed with eminence and a praiseworthy disposition, it is not impossible that there be philosophers and rulers among them.³⁵

While Islamic philosophy appeared to follow a sex unity pattern, at least as far as women philosophers is concerned, Jewish philosophy followed a sex polarity tradition. Philo (13 B.C.-54 A.D.) first articulated this trend when he chose to develop an allegorical method of interpretation of the Bible; he stated: "In the allegorical sense, . . . woman is a symbol of sense, and man, of mind."³⁶ Philo concluded that woman was irrational and prone to deceptive judgements.³⁷

Maimonides (1135-1204) appeared to accept Philo's association of woman with lower rational faculties. In one passage he considered the

influence of passions on a person's health:

Therefore you find these passions have a very great influence only on those individuals having no knowledge of philosophic ethics or the disciplines and admonitions of the Law -- such as youths, women, and foolish men.³⁸

Women, in the Jewish tradition, were not able to study the Torah, and therefore they did not have access to the education they needed to achieve the intellectual level of philosophy. Not surprisingly, there is no evidence of Jewish women philosophers in early Western history.

In contrast to both the Islamic and Jewish traditions, Christianity produced a number of women philosophers. The first record of this tradition is of a martyr, who is alleged to have been a contemporary of Hypatia. Catherine of Alexandria (?-307), who became known in the later medieval period as the patroness of Christian philosophers, is reputed to have been killed by the Emperor Maximillian after converting 50 pagan philosophers to Christianity. In one account, Catherine stated:

Such is all that you think today to strive against me with: Homer's reasonings, and Aristotle's tricks; Esculapius' crafts, and Galen's grips (=art); Philostio's arguments, and Plato's books; and all these writers' writings you lean upon. Though I am well instructed in all these from such (an) early (age), that I never found many equal to me, yet, because they are full of vain-glory, and void of that blessed life-giving doctrine, I now utterly forsake them, and give them all up.³⁹

Since no record of Catherine exists until four centuries after her death, it is now believed that she was not authentic. However, it is significant that she held an important position in the consciousness of late medieval Europe; she was believed to be the epitome of a woman philosopher.

In a similar way, Boethius (480-524) created an imaginary "Lady Philosophy" in his Consolation of Philosophy.⁴⁰ Lady Philosophy presented a wide range of sophisticated philosophical arguments to lead Boethius to a deeper understanding of the purpose and practice of philosophy. This literary device imitated Plato's use of Diotima to teach Socrates about the true nature of love in The Symposium.⁴¹

The most well known, early Christian philosopher, St. Augustine (354-430), rather surprisingly included his mother, Monica, in two of his dialogues. In the De ordine, Monica raised two points about the nature of evil and the order of God, which were central to Augustine's argument. In this dialogue, Monica's capacity for philosophy was praised. After Augustine stated that the study of grammar, rhetoric, dialectic, numbers, and music were necessary to philosophy, he turned to his mother and said:

But I pray you, let not this immense seeming forest of things deter you just because we have need of some of them for what we are investigating. . . . For many persons, to be sure they are difficult to learn. But for you, whose talents are brought home to me anew every day . . . these matters will be as easy as they are for duller souls who live most wretchedly.⁴²

In the same dialogue, Monica asked:

What are you doing? In those books which you read, have I ever heard that women were introduced into this kind of disputation?

and her son responded:

I care but little about the judgements of proud and ignorant men. . . . Believe me, then, there will not be lacking a class of men to whom the fact that you converse with men on the subject of philosophy will be more than pleasing, than if they were to find here something else of pleasantry or seriousness. Moreover, in olden times, women, too, have worked on the problems of philosophy.⁴³

It is in the dialogue De beata vita, that Monica is given a central philosophical role. Augustine claims that this dialogue is based on a real conversation:

Our mother, too, was with us. . . . It was particularly on the occasions of a rather important disputation which I once held on my birthday with my companions, and which I have compiled into a little book (De beata vita) that her mind had been revealed to me as so rare that nothing seemed more adapted for true philosophy.⁴⁴

In the dialogue, Monica asked the important questions, forced the necessary distinctions, and presented the conclusions. After this discussion on the

nature of the soul, the will, skepticism, and happiness, Augustine exclaimed: "Mother, you have taken completely the stronghold of philosophy."⁴⁵ At this point St. Augustine described a passage from Cicero, and then he concluded:

Upon which words she so spoke out, that unmindful of her sex,
we might think that some great man was seated with us.⁴⁶

The above comments of St. Augustine, claiming that a woman who does philosophy loses her sexual identity, reveals a certain sex unity tendency. This same tendency was found in the fact that one of Plato's women disciples wore men's clothes, and in Porphyry's suggestion to his wife not to trouble herself whether she is male or female in the body. While the sex unity tradition remained open to women philosophers, it did so at the cost of their sexual identity. At the same time, the sex polarity tradition denied women's capacities, while keeping a clear differentiation between the sexes.

The development of a third alternative to the traditions of sex unity and sex polarity for women philosophers, did not fully develop until the beginning of the Benedictine age in Western philosophy. Previous to that time, the Pythagoreans were the only example of a school which accepted women philosophers as equal to men philosophers, while at the same time recognizing that there were significant differences between the two sexes. The tradition of double monasteries within the Benedictine tradition provided a second opportunity for the development of a sex complementarity among women and men philosophers.

Hilda of Whitby (614-680) was Abbess of a monastery which contained a school for men, five of whom went on to become bishops.⁴⁷ The church historian, Bede, stated that: "Her prudence was so great that not only did ordinary persons, but even sometimes kings and princes, seek and receive counsel of her in their necessities."⁴⁸

The first Benedictine nun to leave a record of her philosophical writings was Roswitha of Gandersheim (c. 935-1002). While Roswitha is better known as a poet and dramatist, she did study and write philosophy. Paphnutius and Sapientia, who are the central figures in two plays of the same names, are both philosophers who delight in confusing disciples and

emperors with their philosophical knowledge.⁴⁹

In the Preface to her Plays, Roswitha mentions that she exchanged her writings with men:

To you, learned and virtuous men, who do not envy the success of others, but on the contrary rejoice in it as becomes the truly great, Hrotswitha, poor humble sinner, sends wishes for your health in this life and your joy in eternity. . . . To think that you, who have been nurtured in the most profound philosophical studies and have attained knowledge in perfection, should have deigned to approve the humble work of an obscure woman.⁵⁰

After remarking on their approval of the plays, and the encouragement they gave her to continue, she described how she came to her knowledge and skill:

(God) has given me a perspicacious mind, but one that lies fallow and idle when it is not cultivated. That my natural gifts might not be made void by negligence, I have been at pains, whenever I have been able to pick up some threads and scraps torn from the old mantle of philosophy, to weave them into the stuff of my own book.⁵¹

The philosophy which was available to Roswitha in the monastery probably included the writings of Boethius, St. Augustine, the Stoics, and Platonists. With the exception of section from logic, Aristotle's works had not yet been translated into Latin.

The Abbess Herrad of Landsberg (1130-1195) wrote the first extensive encyclopedia for women. In her preface to the encyclopedia, Herrad states: "This book titled Garden of Delights, I myself, the little bee, composed inspired by God, from the sap of diverse flowers from Holy Scriptures and from philosophical works."⁵² Unfortunately, the text of the encyclopedia was destroyed in a fire. However, the extraordinary drawings which accompanied it have survived. In the centre of one drawing, entitled "Philosophy and the Liberal Arts", philosophy, personified as a woman, wears a crown, from which ethics, logic, and physics emerged as three distinct divisions of study. Socrates and Plato sit enscribing, at her feet.⁵³

It was the Abbess Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179), who developed into the supreme example of a woman philosopher within the Benedictine tradition of

double monasteries. She wrote as a scientist, mystic, theologian, and philosopher, dictating in Latin and German to a monk from her companion monastery. Her works covered such subjects as the classification of stones, description of the healing powers of plants, analysis of Gregorian chant, consideration of the relation of microcosm and macrocosm, description of numerous mystical experiences, assessment of the practice of human virtue, and the psychology of the interaction of women and men. Title of some of her works still extant are: Scivias (Wisse die Wege), Liber Simplicis Medicinae (Naturkunde), Liber Compositae Medicinae (Heilkunde), Liber Vitae Meritorum (Der Mensch in der Verantwortung), and Liber Divinorum Operum (Welt und Mensch).⁵⁴

Hildegard claimed that she gained her knowledge from direct infusion by God. In Liber Divinorum Operum she reported that God said to her: "O, poor little woman who are the daughter of many labours . . . thou seest these things with thy interior eyes, and hears them with the interior eyes of the soul; commit them to durable writing for the use of men."⁵⁵ However, it is clear that Hildegard had also read widely. One critic suggested that she was familiar with concepts from Aristotle's De Caelo et Mundo and Meteorologica, Boethius' Consolation of Philosophy, Isidore's De Rerum Natura, Bernard Sylvester's De mundi universitate sive metacosmos et microcosmos, Constantine of Africa's On the Nature of Man, and Hugo St. Viktor's On the Members and Parts of Man.⁵⁶

In addition, from study of her works, it is clear that Hildegard was an astute observer of human life. In the history of the study of philosophy of sex identity, Hildegard stands out as being the first person to develop a detailed analysis of the differences between the two sexes within a context in which she affirmed the fundamental equality of woman and man. For this reason, she can be considered the first to articulate a philosophy of sex complementarity.

Hildegard's philosophy of sex identity is found in Heilkund, where she develops a theory of four basic types of women and four basic types of men. Her framework for this analysis is the medieval theory that a person is

composed of a combination of elements and humours. She argued that woman was closer to the two middle elements, air and water; while man was closer to the lowest element, earth, and the highest element, fire. This led to a view that man was rougher, stronger, and more passionate; while woman was more refined and self controlled.

Within this rather broad description, individual differences were caused by the varying presence of different humours. These differences were described according to their consequences in women on muscular structure, quality of blood, colour of skin, degree of fertility, heaviness of menstruation, tendencies toward different diseases after menopause, and analysis of character. Her division of women into four basic types was matched by a similar kind of analysis of men according to quality of blood, colour of skin, degree of fertility, quality of children, and analysis of character.

While Hildegard's framework was clearly medieval, her examples and observations were astonishingly modern. She described the interaction of the different kinds of men and women in both sexual and chaste relationships. While there is no room here to do justice to her analysis, a few short examples will be offered. She described the first type of man, with too much of the element fire, who chased after women: "Their eyes are kept fixed on the object of their love like arrows as soon as they catch sight of it."⁵⁷ The second kind of man, who has a balance of the elements air and fire, was called a "golden edifice of embrace" because "the eyes of such men can meet squarely with those of the women, much in contrast to those of other men's eyes that were fixed on them like arrows."⁵⁸ A third kind of man, who suffered from too much of the humour black bile, was a misogynist. Hildegard observed: "If they were permitted, these men would kill a woman during their intercourse."⁵⁹ Finally, the fourth kind of man, who suffered from a general weakness of all the elements, had little interest in women. Hildegard graphically described his sexual anatomy: "His two spheres, meant to serve him like bellows to mend the fire, are stunted, underdeveloped and too feeble to erect the trunk, for they do not hold within them the riches of the fiery power."⁶⁰

Hildegard's analysis contained many of the same kinds of reflections as contemporary phenomenology and existentialism. Her consideration of the differences between women and men, of the interaction of physiology and character, and of health and disease, reveals a striking originality. In this way, Hildegard stands out from many of the women philosophers who were disciples and followers of a male philosopher, rather than originators of a philosophical tradition in their own right. Therefore, Hildegard is significant for the history of women philosophers for two reasons: she was an original thinker, and she was the first to articulate a foundation for a theory of sex complementarity.

In the conclusion of this paper, I will suggest a reason why Hildegard's importance never received proper recognition. Between the years 800 and 1200 nearly all higher education for Christian philosophers took place within Benedictine monasteries. However, at the end of the eleventh century, a rival educational institution appeared when the Cathedral School opened in Paris, it was supported by the local bishop rather than by a Benedictine abbot or abbess. It was in this context that Abelard, a teacher at the Cathedral School between 1108 and 1118, taught and seduced Heloise.

Heloise (1101-1164) was described by Abelard: "In the extent of her learning she stood supreme."⁶¹ Peter the Venerable agreed with this assessment when he wrote of Heloise:

I had not yet quite passed the bounds of your youth and reached early manhood when I knew of your name and your reputation, not for religion but for your virtuous studies. . . . Even in the minds of men, you have surpassed all women in carrying out your purpose, and have gone further than most men.⁶²

Heloise had carefully studied the Stoics, the Platonists, and the Scholastic method, which had been modeled by Abelard on the logic of Aristotle. However, since the Cathedral School was open only to men, she had to be taught by a private tutor at home. It was this situation which led to her seduction, pregnancy, and banishment to a convent, and Abelard's punitive castration by Heloise's indignant relatives.

The tradition of the exclusion of women from direct attendance at the Cathedral School in Paris was continued with the formation of the Master's Guilds in Paris during the years 1140-1180. With this consolidation of academic power away from the Benedictine monasteries, and assertion of the powers of the bishops over that of abbots and abbesses, a radical shift occurred in European education. One critic claimed: "The transference of educational activity from the monks to the secular clergy constituted . . . the great educational revolution of that century."⁶³ Women in general, and women philosophers in particular, suddenly found themselves without access to the centre of higher education.

It is significant that in this context, Hildegard, at the age of 76, took an arduous journey of over five hundred miles, from Bingen to Paris in 1174, to submit her works to the Bishop of Paris for consideration. She asked that they be studied by all the masters of theology in Paris.⁶⁴ Hildegard must have known that the future of her work rested with this new centre of education. The Bishop merely gave them to one Master, who kept them for three months and then simply returned them to Hildegard, stating that they were "divinely inspired".⁶⁵ Needless to say, Hildegard's books were not included in the curriculum. Theology was instead being formed around the Sentences of Peter Lombard, and philosophy would soon be dominated by the translated works of Aristotle, with commentaries by St. Albert the Great (1193-1280), and St. Thomas (1224-1274).

The difference between Hildegard's example as a woman philosopher and the influx of Aristotelian rationale against women philosophers, is evident in the writings of the above two Dominican philosophers. St. Albert, who first introduced Aristotelian philosophy to the Christian West, agreed with the Greek philosopher: "Because of the coldness of the constitution of women, the refined strengths are weakened because her principle has been badly affected, and consequently her intellect is weaker."⁶⁶ St. Thomas agreed that woman's reason was naturally inferior to man's: "Woman is by nature subordinate to man, because the power of rational discernment is by nature stronger in man."⁶⁷ St. Thomas repeats Aristotle's view that woman has a rational nature, but that it is without authority over the emotions:

Since a woman is free, she has the capacity for understanding but her capacity is weak. The reason for this is on account of the changeableness of nature, her reason adheres to plans, but is quickly removed from them because of emotions.⁶⁸

As a consequence, neither St. Albert nor St. Thomas considered women as capable of the kind of deliberation necessary for philosophy.

At the same time as Aristotelian arguments for sex polarity tradition emerged in Western Europe, the institutional structures for a new university in Paris began to form. The Master's Guilds in Paris received some recognition by a Bull of 1210, and by 1215 statutes were established to formally being a University at Paris. In 1217 the Dominicans established a house in Paris, in 1219 the Franciscans followed, and then the Cistercians, Premonstransians, and Augustinians. Corresponding women's orders to these male mendicant orders became strictly cloistered, a change in the tradition of a loose cloister which allowed Benedictine women to travel outside the monastery. By 1231, the relation between the University and the bishops had been officially settled. All students and masters had to be ecclesiastics; women, therefore, were officially excluded. Masters were sworn into their positions, as knights had been sworn into brotherhood of arms. The University of Paris became, according to Rashdall, "an intellectual knighthood".⁶⁹

By 1254, the University of Paris had grown into an institution with the four separate faculties of Arts, Theology, Medicine, and Law. In 1255 the works of Aristotle, recently translated from the Greek, became required reading. In this way, Aristotelian rationale for sex polarity, and its claim that women's deliberative powers were "without authority" over their irrational consciousness, gave an intellectual framework to further justify the exclusion of women from higher education.

The establishment of the University of Paris set an example for other cities and, within the next century, universities sprang up all over Europe. Modeling themselves after Paris in both structure and curriculum, women were excluded more and more from the study of philosophy. While a few women were able to study at the southern universities such as Salerno, Montpellier, and Salamanca, they were excluded from all the other northern

universities, including Oxford and Cambridge.⁷⁰ Therefore, women were kept out of the best universities of the time. In this way, women lost the opportunity to live and work at the centre of European intellectual activity. It took centuries before women philosophers were able, once again, to study and write in close relationship with men philosophers.

Therefore, the answer to the first question posed at the beginning of this paper, namely: Why did the tradition of women philosophers end in the thirteenth century? is found in the radical shift in the structure of education which occurred between 1200 and 1300. The loss of the complementary model of education within the double monasteries, which had been so fruitful for women and men from 800 to 1100, resulted in the exclusion of women from nearly all higher education. The subsequent influx of Aristotelian rationale for sex polarity, merely consolidated the impression that women ought not to study and practice philosophy. It has taken until the 20th century to bring about the necessary structural changes to allow, once again, for the cooperative participation of women and men in the study of the perennial questions of philosophy.

The answer to the second question posed, namely: Was there any relation between the concept of woman articulated by a school of philosophy and the presence of women philosophers within that tradition? has also been sketched out. Specifically, women philosophers appear to spring up in traditions that articulate a theory of the equality of woman and man. Platonic thought, which produced many women philosophers, provided a framework for what may be called a sex unity theory. According to this view, women and men are equal because there are no significant differences between the sexes. The theory of sex complementarity, which also argued for the equality of women and men, but at the same time defended a significant difference between women and men, also produced several women philosophers. Only the sex polarity tradition, which claimed that the sexes were significantly different and that man was superior to woman, left the legacy of practically no women philosophers. By the adoption of an Aristotelian framework, it provided the rationale for blocking women from the study of philosophy. Therefore, it is safe to conclude that the concept of woman, which is articulated by a school of philosophy, has an effect on the presence or absence of women philosophers within it.

FOOTNOTES

- ¹This text has received a subvention from The Canadian Federation for the Humanities and is presently being considered for publication by Wilfrid Laurier University Press.
- ²Sappho, Poems and Fragments, Guy Davenport, trans. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1965.
- ³Theano, Femmes Pythagoriciennes: fragments et lettres de Théano, Périctioné, Phintys, Mélissa, et Myia, Mario Meunier, ed., Christiane Teasdale, trans. p. 4.
- ⁴Périctioné, ibid., Frag. viii, pp. 52-53.
- ⁵Meunier, ibid., Prolégomenes, p. 9.
- ⁶Daniel Gershenson and Daniel A. Greenberg, Anaxagoras and The Birth of Physics. New York: Blaisdell Publishing Co., 1964.
- ⁷Plato, Menexenus, 237^e-238^a, 248^d, 336^c; Encyclopedia Britannica, Micropedia, 1968, Vol. 1, "Aspasia"; Xenophon, Oeconomicus (14-15).
- ⁸For a fictional reconstruction of the life of Aspasia see Taylor Caldwell, The Glory and the Lightning. Garden City: Doubleday, 1974.
- ⁹Democritus, Ancilla to the Pre-Socratic Philosophers, Kathleen Freeman, ed. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1948, Frag. 110, p. 93.
- ¹⁰Plato, Republic, The Collected Dialogues of Plato, Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns, eds. New York: Pantheon Books, 1971, 455^e-456^a.
- ¹¹Plato, Timaeus, 90.
- ¹²Diogenes Laertius, Lives of Eminent Philosophers. Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1941, III, 46; Pierre Boyance, Le culte des Muses chez les Philosophes Grecs. Paris, E. de Brocard, 1972, pp. 272-273.
- ¹³Ibid., IV, 1.
- ¹⁴Aristotle, Politics, The Basic Works of Aristotle, Richard McKeon, ed. New York: Random House, 1941, 1260^a 1-15.
- ¹⁵Diogenes Laertius, op. cit., VI, 96-98. She was the sister of Metrocles and the wife of Crates.
- ¹⁶Encyclopedia Britannica, op. cit., "Epicurus", Vol. 8, p. 638.

- ¹⁷ Lucretius, De rerum natura, The Stoic and Epicurian Philosophers: The Complete Extant Writings of Epicurus, Epictetus, Lucretius, and Marcus Aurelius. Whitney, J. Oates, ed. New York: Random House, 1940, IV 1230-1240.
- ¹⁸ Seneca to Marcia, "On Consolation" in Moral Essays. New York and London: G.P. Putnam's Sons and William Heinemann, Ltd., 1928-1932, Vol. II, 16, 1-2, p. 49.
- ¹⁹ Ibid., 17, 3-5, p. 479.
- ²⁰ Ibid.
- ²¹ Epictetus, Oates, op. cit., Frag. 15, p. 463.
- ²² Galen, On the Usefulness of the Parts of the Body. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1968, B 14, 11, 299.
- ²³ Plutarch, Moralia. Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press and William Heinemann, Ltd., 1927-1937, III, 240-263.
- ²⁴ Plutarch, "Advice to Bride and Groom" in Moralia, ibid., II, 145c pp. 337-339.
- ²⁵ Plutarch, "Dinner of Seven Wise Men" in Moralia, ibid., II, 148 D, p. 361.
- ²⁶ Porphyry, "Life of Plotinus" in Enneads. London and Cambridge: Harvard University and William Heinemann, Ltd., 1966, Vol. I, p. 31.
- ²⁷ Porphyry, The Philosopher and His Wife, Marcella. London: George Redway, 1896, (33), pp. 77-78.
- ²⁸ Ibid., (3), p. 55.
- ²⁹ Ivor Thomas, Selections Illustrating the History of Greek Mathematics. Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press and William Heinemann, Ltd., 1939, Vol. 1, 48, n.a., II 285, n.a.; II, 517, n.b.
- ³⁰ John Toland, Tetradymus. London: J. Brotherton and W. Meadows, 1720, p. 106. I have change the language into modern English.
- ³¹ Ibid., (according to Suidas).
- ³² Ibid., p. 109.
- ³³ Ibid., pp. 130-131.
- ³⁴ Averroes On Plato's Republic. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1974, 53, 9-10, p. 57. Note that Averroes adds the phrase "and we say". This implies that he is not merely repeating Plato's views.
- ³⁵ Ibid., 53, 25, p. 58.

- ³⁶ Philo, Questions and Answers on Genesis. Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press and William Heinemann, Ltd., 1953, I, 37, p. 22. See also I, 47, p. 37. "Woman is a symbol of sense, and man of mind."
- ³⁷ Ibid., IV, 15, p. 288; and I, 33, p. 20.
- ³⁸ Maimonides, Ethical Writings of Maimonides. New York: New York University Press, 1975, Chapt. III, p. 106.
- ³⁹ Anonymous, Life of St. Katherine from Royal MS A xxvii. London: N. Trübner and Co., 1884. I have changed the language into modern English.
- ⁴⁰ Boethius, The Consolation of Philosophy. Indianapolis: Bobbs Merrill, 1926.
- ⁴¹ Plato, Symposium, 201d-213a.
- ⁴² Augustine, De Ordine, (Divine Providence and the Problem of Evil). New York: Cosmopolitan and Art Service, Inc., 1942, II, 18, 47.
- ⁴³ Ibid., I, 11, 31.
- ⁴⁴ Ibid., II, 1, 1.
- ⁴⁵ Augustine, De beata vita (Happiness: A Study). Philadelphia: The Peter Reilly Company, 1937, 10.
- ⁴⁶ Ibid.
- ⁴⁷ Lina Echenstein, Women Under Monasticism: Chapters on Saint-Lore and Convent Life Between A.D. 500 and A.D. 1500. New York: Russell and Russell, 1963, p. 91.
- ⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 90.
- ⁴⁹ The Plays of Roswitha. New York: Cooper Square Publishers, Inc., 1966; The Non-Dramatic Works of Roswitha. Dissertation by Sister M. Gonsalva Wiegand, O.S.F., Saint Louis, Missouri, 1936; and Hrosvithae Liber Tertius, dissertation by Sister Mary Bernardine Bergman, Saint Louis, Missouri, 1942.
- ⁵⁰ The Plays of Roswitha, ibid., xxviii.
- ⁵¹ Ibid., xxix.
- ⁵² Herrad of Landsberg, Hortus Deliciarum (Garden of Delights). New Rochelle, New York: Caratzas Brothers, Publishers, 1971, preface, p. vii.
- ⁵³ Ibid., Plate X, ibis, p. 36.
- ⁵⁴ These texts are available from Otto Müller Verlag, in Salzburg.

- ⁵⁵ Hildegard, Liber Divinorum Operum, extracted in Francesca Steele, The Life and Visions of St. Hildegard. London: Heath, Cranton, and Ousely, Ltd., 1914, p. 205.
- ⁵⁶ Charles Joseph Singer, "The Visions of Hildegard of Bingen" in From Magic to Science: Essays on the Scientific Twilight, New York: Dover Publications, 1958, pp. 235-238.
- ⁵⁷ Hildegard of Bingen, Heilkund: das Buch von den grund und wesen und der Heilung der Krankheiten. (Causae et curae). Salzburg: Otto Müller Verlag, 1957. Translated by Jasmin El Kordi Schmidt, p. 138.
- ⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 140.
- ⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 141.
- ⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 142.
- ⁶¹ Abelard, Historia Calamitatum, The Story of My Misfortunes, an Autobiography by Peter Abelard. St. Paul: T.A. Boyd, 1922, p. 66.
- ⁶² Peter the Venerable in The Letters of Abelard and Heloise. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1974, no. 115, pp. 277-278.
- ⁶³ Hastings Rashdall, The Universities of Europe in the Middle Ages. London: Oxford University Press, 1958, Vol. I, p. 275.
- ⁶⁴ Jacques Christophe, Sainte Hildegard. Paris: Gullimard, 1942, pp. 49-52. The works submitted were Scivias, Liber Vitae Meritorum and Liber Divinorum Operum.
- ⁶⁵ Steele, op. cit., p. 75.
- ⁶⁶ Albertus Magnus, Quaestiones super de animalibus, Opera Omnia. Paris: Apud Ludovicum Vives, 1890-1899, Book XV, Quaest 11. Translated by Dr. Diane Gordon.
- ⁶⁷ Thomas Aquinas, Summa theologiae. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1964, ia, 92, 1.
- ⁶⁸ Thomas Aquinas, In octo libros Policorum. Quebec: Tremblay and Dion, 1940. Liber I, p. 51. Translated by Dr. Diane Gordon.
- ⁶⁹ Rashdall, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 287.
- ⁷⁰ Gabriel Compayré, Abelard and the Origin and Early History of Universities. New York: Greenwood Press, 1969, pp. 50-53. See also Gordon Leff, Paris and Oxford Universities in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries: An Institutional and Intellectual History. New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1968.